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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, January 24, 2008

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WAS ABUSE IGNORED?

Prosecutor says state failed to bring allegations forward

By SHAUN BYRON
Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC - Social workers were called at least nine times about the welfare of a nowdeceased 3-year-old girl and her three siblings, according to Oakland County prosecutors. Prosecutors say allegations of abuse by the mother of Fantasia Reese were never brought to them by state investigators working for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

A hearing Wednesday on neglect petitions for Fantasia's mother, Sharon Hobson of Pontiac, was postponed until Jan. 28. Oakland County Family Court Referee David Bilson ordered Hobson to have no contact with her remaining children until the case is resolved. The hearing is to determine if there's sufficient evidence to terminate Hobson's parental rights to the three other children. The children have been placed in foster care or with family members.

Abuse allegations surfaced against Hobson after Fantasia was placed in the critical care unit of Royal Oak Beaumont Hospital on Jan. 13 and taken off life support Jan. 16.

"It's like 'Ricky Holland Two,' " said Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca, alluding to the 7-year-old Williamston boy whose adoptive parents were convicted of killing him.

Pontiac police continue to investigate Fantasia's death, the year's second homicide in the city. So far, no arrests have been made or criminal charges filed against anyone in the case.

Prosecutors say Wednesday's hearing couldn't proceed because DHS investigators didn't fax evidence to their office until after 6 p.m. Tuesday.

Kim Thornton, the DHS investigator handling the case, testified she was collecting additional evidence from hospital staff and other sources between Jan. 15 and 18 and that she sent information to the prosecutor's office at 3 p.m. Tuesday.

Bilson said if the parties weren't ready to proceed by the next hearing date, he would have no other option but to dismiss the case.

According to prosecutors, Fantasia's three siblings were removed from Hobson's custody Jan. 15, the day after an order to remove the children was filed by the DHS with Oakland County Family Court.

Gorcyca criticized Thornton, but said the Fantasia Reese case shouldn't be a

reflection on every caseworker at DHS.

"It shouldn't cast dispersions on the good and talented, conscientious workers at DHS," he said. "We also appreciate that DHS is going to look into and investigate the worker's actions."

Complaints about the DHS are nothing new to Fantasia's paternal grandparents, Earnest and Bobbie Reese.

The couple said they have called Child Protective Services Ñ a department inside DHS Ñ numerous times about what they called an unfit life for Hobson's children.

Their son, Earnest Reese Jr. of Pontiac, has one other child with Hobson. That child is currently with his family.

The Reeses say they never witnessed Hobson physically harm her children but were concerned about the number of people who were constantly coming and going from her home.

"She never hit them, but the company she kept around ...," said Bobbie Reese, adding an employee with Child Protection Services had even once commented to them about the large number of people allowed to be in the home.

Also among their concerns was that the children allegedly were poorly groomed and allowed to walk to the park without adult supervision.

They also suspect the children were not properly fed, which was why Fantasia was underweight for her age.

The Reeses believe Hobson was able to fool Child Protective Services investigators by quickly getting her children home and in order before they made their visit.

The investigators would call Hobson before they came to the home, clearly giving her the opportunity to get things in order, Bobbie said.

"I told them something tragic was going to happen over there," she said.

Earnest said he feels their family was let down by the state, allowing their granddaughters to continue living in what they felt was a dangerous situation.

"We live in a day and age where grandparents are taking care of kids. ... The mothers are not doing what they are suppose to," he said. "The state should do more, especially helping fathers. The law is one sided to me."

Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the DHS in Lansing, said she could not comment about the case.

Attorney Moneka L. Sanford, who represents Fantasia's siblings, said the matter is a clear case of child abuse.

Sanford asked Bilson to ban Hobson from having contact with the children because she expects a petition to terminate Hobson's rights is coming and that

her children are scared to talk about the abuse they've endured. "I don't want any fear instilled in these children," she said.

Hobson's attorney, Elliot H. Parnes, said accusations of abuse haven't been proved and requested his client be given supervised visitation to her other children.

Bilson denied the request.

Following the hearing, Parnes declined to comment on the case.

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Thursday, January 24, 2008

Detroit

Foster mom's fate to jury

Canton Township resident is charged with murder during commission of child abuse in 2-year-old's death.

Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A Wayne County Circuit Court jury will begin deliberations today to determine whether the death of a 2-year-old girl in the hands of her foster mother was either a terrible accident or murder. Jurors heard closing arguments Wednesday after 10 days of testimony about how 2-year-old Allison Newman suffered fatal brain injuries inside Carol Poole's Canton Township home on Sept. 22, 2006. Poole, 41, told four different accounts to police when questioned, giving her final version in the hospital where the girl was pronounced dead from brain injuries.

In that version, Poole claims Allison had fallen from her grasp while the two played a twirling game and the girl accidentally tumbled over the railing of a second-story balcony and landed on a hardwood floor.

It is now left to the jury to decide which version is true.

Her attorney Joseph Niskar told jurors on Wednesday that Poole lied in earlier versions, "but, unlike the previous stories that removed her from fault, this one doesn't," he said.

Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Jerry Dorsey IV said Poole's lies haven't ended, and he accused her of crying in court as a way to continue her deception in front of the jury.

"I don't believe the whirlybird story," Dorsey said. "Carol Poole slammed Allison's head on some flat surface; a wall, a counter, the floor; and caused this injury."

Poole is charged with murder during the commission of child abuse, and authorities presented testimony that the girl suffered other injuries from possible prior abuse. Poole also is accused of involuntary manslaughter for failing to get immediate medical help that might have saved the girl. Instead, Poole claimed the girl was conscious after the fall and mumbled, "OK," before putting her to bed.

After the death, state officials removed a younger foster son from Poole's home. Poole, a management recruiter and her husband, Alan, an automotive industry computer technology consultant, had become foster parents when they were unable to conceive their own child.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080124/METRO01/801240362>

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Tomblin arrested for alleged child abuse

By Heidi Berden
Editor

KALKASKA - On the day The Leader hit the streets last week, the Michigan State Police announced that on Jan. 8, MSP trooper had arrested a 24-year-old Kalkaska mother, charging her with child abuse in the first degree.

Officials have confirmed that Tamara Mae Tomblin is being held on a \$50,000 cash bond for alleged child abuse.

According to the MSP release, the arrest came after a three-month investigation into injuries sustained by her then 5-month-old son. According to MSP, on Sept. 17, 2007, near 9 p.m., mother and child were brought to Munson Medical Center by an acquaintance, after the child was found to be somewhat unresponsive with a temperature, after waking.

The MSP release stated that troopers from the Traverse City post contacted the mother at the hospital, after an examination revealed the child was not only unresponsive, but also had trauma to his rectum, head, mouth, and a broken left femur.

Because of the seriousness of the injuries, detectives and troopers from the MSP in Kalkaska, Traverse City, and Ionia, were brought into the investigation, along with investigators from child protective services, the release stated.

As a result of numerous witness interviews and evidence processed at MSP crime labs in both Grayling and Grand Rapids, the Kalkaska County prosecutor has charged the mother with child abuse in the first degree, a 15-year felony, according to the MSP release.

The child was immediately placed in foster care, where he remains and is expected to make a full recovery, the release stated.

Tomblin remains in the Kalkaska County Jail on a \$50,000 cash bond, according to officials, who also confirmed that her preliminary exam is scheduled for Jan. 23.

Berden can be reached at hberden@michigannewspapers.com or by calling 231-258-4600.

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http://www.leaderandkalkaskian.com/stories/012308/loc_lk05.shtml



Father of five sentenced in molestation case

Thursday, January 24, 2008

By John Tunison

The Grand Rapids Press

WALKER -- After discovering her young daughter was molested by her day care provider's husband, a Walker woman wonders whether she should have recognized the signs earlier.

"We didn't think it could happen to us," said the 45-year-old parent, who sat in a courtroom this week as the man her daughter once called a friend was sentenced to prison.

Police alleged Daniel Joseph Torralva, 43, inappropriately touched up to five girls at his home on Lovers Lane NW in Wright Township in recent years.

Under a plea agreement, he was sentenced on two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct against one of the children, the Walker woman's 10-year-old daughter.

The father of five and former U.S. Postal Service worker was sentenced to 40 months to 15 years.

"I think all of us parents probably had little warning signs and never put it together that it added up to something really horrible," the mother said.

Torralva's wife, Margaret, watched several children at a time at their home, according to police and the victim's mother. The girl went to the home on and off during the past five years and spent days there last summer.

The 10-year-old victim told her parents in August she believed Torralva touched her inappropriately several times, describing how he held her down on a bed, lay on top of her and rubbed his body against her. They were always clothed.

Other girls made similar accusations.

"The way he was manipulating the kids ..." the 10-year-old's mother said. "He told them what a great friend he was."

Michigan Department of Human Services records show Margaret Torralva had a state day care license in the 1990s, but the department refused to renew it in 1998.

DHS spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet did not know the state's reason.

Police said they do not believe Margaret Torralva was aware of any molestation. The victims told detectives she was gone on errands during the incidents.

The 10-year-old victim's mother said Daniel Torralva would sometimes take his daughter and other children to a church recreation program.

"We were paying them to keep her safe and help her have fun, but this happened," she said.

During the sentencing, the girl's father described how the revelations caused his family to be "beaten down physically, emotionally and mentally."

"Trust has been broken on many levels," he said.

In the plea agreement, prosecutors pledged not to bring charges involving four other potential victims.

Torralva wept during his sentencing.

"What I did was wrong and I take full responsibility for my actions," he said, asking for forgiveness.

His attorney, Kelly Lambert, described Torralva's behavior as "inconsistent with his past" and said he has been in counseling for five months.

Sorbet, the state spokeswoman, said families looking for day care should be diligent about choosing a provider.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Man to be tried in sex assaults

He's charged with abuse of 3 boys in mentoring program

Thursday, January 24, 2008

BY ART AISNER

The Ann Arbor News

A former mentor with Washtenaw Big Brothers Big Sisters was ordered to stand trial on charges that he sexually abused three boys he met through his volunteer work.

Michael John Brooks, 46, was bound over to Washtenaw County Circuit Court on Tuesday on 14 charges, including eight counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct, at the conclusion of his preliminary hearing, court records show.

The former financial executive is accused of assaulting boys between the ages of 8 and 16 during a 12-year span dating back to 1995, police said.

His three accusers - now ages 24, 20 and 18 - approached police in October to report that Brooks improperly touched them when they were children at his Ann Arbor Township home and during short trips, said Washtenaw County Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler.

Prosecutors added four counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct based on the accusers' testimony at the hearing, which began last week, Egeler said. They also merged a separate case charging Brooks with five counts of possessing child pornography, which investigators said they found on his computer during the sexual assault investigation.

Mark Bilkovic, Brooks' Farmington Hills-based attorney, said Wednesday that the testimony from two accusers was light on specifics and heavy on inconsistencies. He denied the charges and said he knew from the beginning that the case would have to go to trial.

Bilkovic declined to discuss the new charges of possession of child pornography.

"If you're confident in your case, you leave it alone," Bilkovic said. "And if you're not confident, you throw as much stuff to the wall as you can and hope something sticks."

Brooks was a longtime volunteer mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Washtenaw County and hosted athletes involved in USA Hockey tournaments, Egeler said.

Brooks was a vice president and chief compliance officer for Ann Arbor-based Sigma Financial Corp., but is no longer with the company, officials said.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Pastor gets prison time for sexual assault

Thursday, January 24, 2008

Gazette Staff Reports

PAW PAW -- A former Paw Paw church pastor was sentenced Tuesday to 21 months to 10 years in prison for sexual assault.

James Randall Hatfield, 67, was sentenced by Van Buren County Circuit Judge William C. Buhl after pleading guilty in December to one count of assault to commit sexual penetration. Four other felony charges were dismissed.

The Van Buren County Sheriff's Department began a year-long investigation into allegations that Hatfield was sexually abusing minors after receiving a report of alleged molestation in August 2006, authorities said. A female victim told investigators she was abused by Hatfield for several years, while in middle and high school, they said.

Hatfield and two of his sons moved to Alabama while the investigation by sheriff's detectives and Child Protective Services was ongoing, according to a sheriff's department news release. The sheriff's office declined to release the name of the church of which Hatfield was pastor.

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Should 2 boys testify? OAKLAND COUNTY

Circuit judge to decide question in teacher's retrial

January 24, 2008

BY L.L. BRASIER and JOHN WISELY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

A judge is weighing whether two children who made claims against a former Oak Park schoolteacher should be allowed to testify in his upcoming trial.

James Perry, 33, is accused of sexually assaulting the boys in an empty special education room during a lunch break at Key Elementary School in October 2005. They were 4 and 5 at the time.

Advertisement

Perry was convicted of the assaults in 2006, but Oakland County Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris, after learning police and prosecutors did not interview adults assigned to the room, tossed out the conviction. Those adults say the room was always occupied at lunch. They are expected to testify at his new trial March 7.

During his first trial, the children's mothers admitted that they repeatedly questioned the boys after the alleged assault, despite being ordered not to do so by investigators. The mother of the 5-year-old admitted she role-played with the child, and drew up a list of allegations against Perry and had him sign it.

Defense attorney Robyn Frankel on Wednesday asked the judge to hold a competency hearing, saying the boys had been so coached that their accounts could not be depended upon to be reliable should they be called to testify.

"It's our position that the memories of these children have been tainted," Frankel said.

Assistant Prosecutor Joyce Todd said a ruling prohibiting the children's testimony would usurp the jury's role. "Nowhere in the rules is the court permitted to make credibility findings," she said.

Defense attorneys also want to admit reports by psychologists who interviewed the 5-year-old as part of a civil suit filed by his mother against Perry and the Oak Park school district. That suit was settled in 2007. The child's family received \$10,000 from Perry's insurance company and \$40,000 from the school's insurance company. Neither Perry nor the school admitted wrongdoing in the settlement.

Prosecutors want to admit testimony from coworkers that Perry had been seen three times with children in his lap, and had been warned that was inappropriate by administrators.

Defense attorneys say the actions were harmless.

The judge is expected to issue rulings on the motions this month.

Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Should+2+boys+testify%3F+OAKLAND+...> 1/24/2008



Too many sexually abused kids suffer in silence

Saturday, January 19, 2008

By Deirdre Toeller-Novak

Special To The Press

It should not hurt to be a child, but sometimes it does. Relatives, friends and caregivers should not rob a child's innocence, but sometimes they do. And when they do, this betrayal of trust in the most intimate way creates fear and shame that no child should have to bear. Child sexual assault is the silent killer of children's spirits. It's a tragedy of the heart as horrible as cutting the ears from a helpless kitten.

This year my New Year's Resolution is for 5,000 children like Maria. Maria was a carefree child through much of her early childhood. She lived with her mother and her stepfather in what was, by all appearances, a happy home. In order to make ends meet, both Maria's mother and stepfather worked, but they worked alternate shifts so that Maria could always be home with one of them. When she was about 7 years old, Maria began to have nightmares. She withdrew from all of her friends -- especially little boys.

One evening, as she sat at her grandma's house waiting for her stepfather to get out of work and pick her up, grandma sensed that something was wrong. When she asked, Maria replied, "I don't like my stepdad. He's mean to me." After the grandma asked a few more questions, Maria finally revealed the truth.

Upon hearing that her stepfather regularly made Maria sit on the couch with him and watch pornographic films while he fondled her -- and made her fondle him -- the grandma immediately called Maria's mom at work. Together, the three of them called the police. For Maria, there was hope. There was the Children's Assessment Center.

For as many as 5,000 children in Kent County each year, that hope does not exist. Child sexual abuse is silent -- it thrives in the silence of our embarrassment and shame, and it demands silence from its victims. Its effects, however, are devastating.

Sexual abuse impacts a child's physical, social, emotional and moral development in profound ways: 52 percent of children whose sexual abuse is not treated at the time of the disclosure become involved in the juvenile justice system; more than 75 percent of teenage prostitutes have been sexually abused; 70-80 percent of serial rapists report that they were sexually abused as children; and among male survivors, more than 70 percent seek treatment for issues such as substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and attempted suicide. The cost to a child is incalculable; the cost to the community is staggering.

Nationally, one in four girls and one in six boys will suffer from some form of sexual abuse by the time he or she turns 18. In every classroom of 30 children it is likely that seven of those children are or will be sexually assaulted.

According to reported numbers, one child under the age of 18 is sexually assaulted every 3.9 minutes; one child under the age of 12 is sexually assaulted every 7.7 minutes. And yet, only 12 percent to 15 percent of child sexual abuse victims ever speak up. In Kent County, that means there are at least 5,000 children -- each year -- who never speak up. Who are too afraid. Who don't know where to go. Who never fully heal.

Imagine 100 school busses packed full of children about to drive off of a cliff. Wouldn't you speak up? Wouldn't you do all you could to stop the buses before they went another foot?

Those children should be everyone's New Year's Resolution. We can stop the buses. We can save those children from lives of shame and crime, lives of fear, lives that are destroyed at the hands of someone they trusted.

I've heard it said that ignorance carries every excuse for inaction. It's only when you know about the problem that you are compelled to act -- or held responsible in some small way for the outcome. Well now you know. Find out how you can help.

-- Deirdre Toeller-Novak is Executive Director of the Children's Assessment Center in Grand Rapids, which assists child victims of suspected sexual abuse.

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THE DAILY Reporter

Print this story

Great Start Collaborative presents findings to community

Print Page

By Trinity Bird-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — For the past year, the Branch County Great Start Collaborative (BCGSC) has been collecting statistics and studying early childhood education, services and supports in the county.

Coordinator Amy Galliers presented the findings of the study, as well as a plan to develop a "comprehensive early childhood system in Branch County" at a recent Branch County Area Chamber of Commerce After Hours event in Coldwater. Galliers stressed that the plan is to "better the children in the community and ultimately for long-term economic growth in the county."

"When Branch County invests \$1 in early childhood services, we gain a minimum of \$7 in economic growth," the report states. "Early childhood education is an important issue for families with children but equally important for those who do not have children. Poverty, employment rates, crime, community recreation are all impacted by the quality of early education."

In the area of pediatric and family health care, the study found "nearly one out of every three births in Branch County, the mother sought less than adequate pre-natal health care."

According to the study, this is a result of a number of issues, including lack of providers accepting Medicaid as a form of payment, means of transportation, affordable health care and a delay in Medicaid services. With only one or two OB/GYN physicians accepting Medicaid in the county, the largest concern is the availability to services.

In the area of social and emotional health care, the BCGSC found a need for support systems for foster families, parents and children. The plan includes forming a support group for these children and their families.

Childcare was also studied by the BCGSC. The plan calls for the creation of funding sources to allow universal access to quality daycare. Of all the childcare centers in the county, only nine percent accept infants.

Family support and parenting education is also a focus of the study. In 2004, the percentage of mothers in Branch County without a high school diploma was 28 percent compared to 17 percent statewide. In 2000, the percentage of children under age 18 in



Trinity Bird / The Reporter Amy Galliers, center, presented the Branch County Great Start Collaborative Report to the Community at an After Hours event held recently at the Coldwater Elks Club. She is shown with Cathy Gordon and Mike Beckwith.

single-parent families was 24.5 in Michigan and 36.2 in Branch County.

The BCGSC plan calls for a public awareness campaign to educate the importance of early childhood education and issues.

The increase in children through age 5 receiving food assistance is also of concern. BCGSC has set a goal of finding mentors to “coach” families to “make better choice and to become independent and responsible parents.”

Now, the BCGSC will begin tackling the goals set forward by their findings.

The BCGSC is funded by, and working in partnership with, the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC). The ECIC is a statewide initiative that recognizes education begins at birth (not when a child enters school) and works to effectively focus early childhood efforts and leverage public and private support to expand the availability of high-quality early education and child care, including parent education.

To view the full Great Start Strategic Plan, visit www.branchcountygreatstart.com or for more information, contact Galliers at (517) 278-5600.

The report concludes, “Branch County will prosper if we all support our most important natural resource — our community’s children.”

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Michigan Report

January 23, 2008

JUDICIARY PANEL REVIEWS 'SECOND CHANCE' BILLS FOR JUVENILES

From varying perspectives, they are juveniles who committed heinous crimes in which their victims will never get a second chance, but they are also individuals who have been rehabilitated and are deserving of a chance to leave a life behind bars. They are juveniles who were convicted of a crime in which their punishment was life in prison without the possibility of parole. On Wednesday, the House Judiciary Committee began weighing legislation prohibiting that as a sentencing option.

The legislative package ([HB 4402](#), [HB 4403](#), [HB 4404](#) and [HB 4405](#)) would prohibit judges from sentencing an individual under the age of 18 to life without parole and in cases where a juvenile was sentenced as an adult, that person would have to serve at least 10 years behind bars before being eligible for parole. Typically, a person who receives that sentence has to serve at least 15 years before being eligible for parole.

The committee did not take a vote on the legislation after hearing testimony for four hours, but committee Chair [Rep. Paul Condino](#) (D-Southfield) said he wants to take votes by March.

Mr. Condino, one of the bill sponsors, said sentencing juveniles without the possibility of parole is a human rights violation and the United States is wrong in being the last country in the "civilized" world to allow it.

"If we are a society that believes in rehabilitation we better believe in our children," he said.

Sheryl Pimlott Kubiak, a Michigan State University professor, told the committee about a survey she did of 1,340 Michigan residents that found 48 percent of respondents believe the current law for juveniles who commit crimes is wrong while 41 percent think it's right (11 percent were unsure). However, 66 percent of those surveyed said a juvenile convicted of homicide should be sent to a juvenile facility until 18 and then sent to an adult facility and be eligible for parole.

Only 5 percent of respondents, when asked about what specific sentence a juvenile should get, picked life without parole in an adult prison, she said.

Deb LaBelle, a civil rights attorney, said she supports the bills because juveniles are more effected by negative influences and their character is not

as well formed compared to an adult, so their irresponsible conduct can't be viewed as morally reprehensible as the same conduct of an adult.

Since the state allowed juveniles to receive a life without parole sentence in 1996, in response to a series of violent crimes in the 1980s and 1990s, 300 adolescents have been sent to prison for life "without a second glance," Ms. LaBelle said.

Mark Fancher, racial justice staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan, also argued in support of the bills that sentencing juveniles to life without parole is in fact a harsher punishment than adults get with that same sentence because the younger juveniles will live behind bars for more years. He also said poor juveniles are disproportionately sentenced to life without parole because many times their appointed counsel does not represent them properly.

Other proponents of the legislation, including educators, criminal justice students, families of the convicted and officials in the religious community also shared several stories of individuals they've encountered who are remorseful for their crimes and have completely transformed from the person they were at age 15 or 16.

But Rob Moran, head of the Wayne County Homicide Division, testified in opposition to the bills, saying out of the 33 homicide cases involving juveniles handled by his office since 2002, only five were sentenced to life without parole and that's because they didn't take a plea offered by the prosecutors office. He emphasized that Wayne County handles nearly 80 percent of the homicide cases each year in the state.

"We're not talking about an epidemic of juveniles being committed to life without parole," he said.

He, along with Saginaw County Prosecutor Michael Thomas, described several cases where juveniles intentionally acted with brutality on their victims and were sentenced to life without parole for that brutality. Mr. Moran said the five cases where the juveniles didn't take a plea bargain include a case where a girl killed her grandmother with a hammer and then burnt her body.

Mr. Moran added, "We need to think about the victim's perspective when we talk about these bills."

He also talked about three cases in which juveniles were tried and convicted, sent to juvenile facilities, released and then went on to kill 10 people in separate situations.

Mr. Thomas said there is already a remedy for juveniles who have been rehabilitated to get out of prison, which is to receive a pardon by the

governor. He too said there have been few cases in his county where a juvenile received a life sentence without parole.

The two men argued the bills take away the discretion available to a prosecutor in these cases.

But [Rep. Andy Coulouris](#) (D-Saginaw) said that if prosecutors can make a determination about parole at the outset, then why shouldn't that be afforded when a person has been in prison for more than a decade. Mr. Moran said prosecutors are more accountable to the public who elects them than a parole board is.

Mr. Condino said while the two prosecuting attorneys may have a low rate of these kinds of convictions wasn't it important for lawmakers to look more broadly and focus on rehabilitating children.

Mr. Thomas countered that the low rate of these sentences is because prosecutors do feel strongly about rehabilitation.

Stalking Awareness Month underscores issue's severity, prevalence

Services Online Domestic Violence
Resource Directory
www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence

The National Center for
Victims of Crime
Stalking Resource Center
www.ncvc.org/src

By Cortney Casey
C & G Staff Writer

It's often used as the punch line of a joke, or dismissed as an innocuous nuisance.

But for the nearly 1.5 million victims nationwide each year, stalking is a serious crime that often leads to an assault — or even murder.

In an effort to publicize the grim statistics behind stalking and its link with domestic violence, as well as highlight resources available to victims, Gov. Jennifer Granholm has deemed January as Stalking Awareness Month in Michigan.

Though stalking is a term commonly linked with rabid fans staking out celebrities, “it happens to everyday people,” said Beth Morrison, president and CEO of HAVEN, an Oakland County-based center for domestic violence treatment and prevention. “It’s a lot more prevalent than people probably know or understand it is. Statistically, it’s one in 12 women and one in 45 men who are stalked in their lifetimes.”

The average stalking incident lasts 1.8 years, a statistic that increases to 2.2 years if the perpetrator is a current or former intimate partner of the victim, said Morrison.

Sarah Heuser, education and prevention director for the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention & Treatment Board, said strides in technology have made it even easier for stalkers to track their

victims using computers, cell phones, GPS, etc.

With the rise of technology, “I don’t know that (stalking is) more prevalent, but I do think it steps it up a notch in terms of what’s available as a means of stalking,” she said. “It’s just another method stalkers use.”

Stalking can lead to fear, anxiety, insomnia, depression and work difficulties among victims, but it also can be “life-threatening,” said Morrison, noting that 76 percent of those murdered by intimate partners were stalked beforehand.

The first signs may be seemingly harmless to onlookers. Perpetrators often begin by showering the victim with flowers, jewelry and other gifts, said Heuser.

“When those things don’t work, those behaviors often escalate into more violent, more frightening behaviors,” she said. “There is a real link between stalking and domestic violence.”

In 59 percent of cases involving female stalking victims, the perpetrators are current or former intimate partners, said Heuser. Witnessing what appear to be romantic gestures, friends of a victim may struggle to understand why the victim won’t reunite with the stalker, which can make victims feel their emotions are invalid and cut them off from important resources, she said.

No matter what others say, Heuser urged victims to “trust that instinct, trust that gut feeling” if they believe they’re being stalked.

“I think what people tend to do is minimize and think this isn’t that big of a deal,” agreed Carmen Wargel, director of community development for Turning Point, a Macomb County-based center that provides programs for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. “But it is that big of a deal, and it is a criminal act. We just want to validate and acknowledge the seriousness of what’s happening to people.”

As chief of the Domestic Violence Unit for the Macomb County Prosecutor’s Office, Jennifer Andary has seen countless stalking

cases and their outcomes.

“There’s an incredible link between domestic violence and stalking,” she said. “It’s part of the entire power and control cycle of a batterer. It’s very narcissistic and controlling behavior.”

Depending on the circumstances, stalking perpetrators may face a one-year misdemeanor charge with up to five years of probation for “engaging in a willful course of conduct involving repeated or continuing harassment,” said Andary.

A five-year aggravated felony charge is applicable in situations where other factors come into play, such as when the perpetrator has violated bond conditions from a domestic violence case, has a previous stalking conviction, etc., she said.

She urged stalking victims to secure a personal protection order at the first sign of trouble, as a PPO can provide the documentation police need to make an arrest if an incident occurs.

Victims can seek a PPO through their county courthouse or enlist the assistance of domestic violence organizations to do so.

Wargel and Morrison said their respective organizations also provide “safety planning” to help victims feel more secure.

“If you find yourself being the victim of stalking or any type of harassment, seek help,” said Andary. “That behavior escalates, and we don’t want to see the numbers of the public who are victims of stalking ultimately in a situation where their safety is in jeopardy — they’re hurt, they’re even worse than hurt. They can even end up dead. It’s very lethal behavior.”

You can reach Staff Writer Cortney Casey at ccasey@candgnews.com or at (586) 498-1046.

Reach out to resources

A variety of resources are available for victims of stalking,

including:

National Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-SAFE
TTY: (800) 787-3224

Turning Point
24-hour crisis line:
(586) 463-6990

Sexual assault counseling:
(586) 468-6118

Domestic violence counseling:
(586) 468-5680

Personal protection orders:
(586) 469-7494

Business line:
(586) 463-4430

HAVEN
24-hour local crisis line:
(248) 334-1274

24-hour toll-free hotline:
(877) 922-1274

Business line:
(248) 334-1284

Michigan Department of Human Services Online Domestic
Violence Resource Directory
www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence

The National Center for
Victims of Crime

Stalking Resource Center
www.ncvc.org/src



Woman threw boiling water at husband -- cops

POLICE BLOTTER

GENESEE TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, January 24, 2008

By Elizabeth Shaw

eshaw@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6311

GENESEE TWP. - A woman was arrested on domestic assault charges Wednesday, after allegedly throwing a pot of boiling water on her husband during an argument at their Carpenter Road home.

Police said the woman, 55, called 911 to report a domestic assault at about 5:50 p.m., but when police arrived, they found she had left and her husband, 51, was injured. He told police he had come home, and she threw the boiling water on him during an argument.

He was transported to a local hospital where he is being treated. His condition was unknown this morning, police said.

His wife was arrested later at a friend's home in Genesee Township. She is lodged in the Genesee County Jail.

Police said the couple are in the process of a divorce, and officers have been called to the residence numerous times for domestic disputes.

- Elizabeth Shaw

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Woman faces trial in death of mother

Thursday, January 24, 2008

BY LYNN TURNER

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com

388-8564

PORTAGE -- The daughter of an elderly Portage woman who died after suffering blunt-force injuries was ordered to stand trial Wednesday on two charges of causing her mother's death.

Diane Diamante, 56, of Portage, is to stand trial on one charge of second-degree murder, which carries a sentence of up to life in prison, and one charge of involuntary manslaughter, which carries a maximum penalty of up to 15 years in prison.

Portage police investigators said Diamante told them she had a fight with her mother on Aug. 5 and "didn't plan for this to happen," Detective Michele Kozminske testified during a preliminary examination before Kalamazoo County District Judge Robert C. Kropf.

Margaret Diamante, 87, was admitted to Borgess Medical Center that day with a severe brain injury -- a large blood clot on the brain -- in addition to a fracture of a bone in the spinal cord in the neck region, fresh and old bruises all over her body and old rib and spine fractures, testified Dr. Fresca Swaniker, a trauma surgeon at Borgess.

Margaret Diamante died Aug. 17.

Kozminske said she and another detective spoke to Diamante while her mother was in Borgess. Kozminske spoke with her a second time after Diamante checked herself into Borgess' psychiatric unit.

"She cried when she talked about beating her mother and that her mother was going to die as a result," Kozminske testified. "I don't think she planned to kill her mother."

A physical altercation started while the two were in a shared bed and continued after the elder Diamante left the bed but was still in the room, Kozminske said she was told.

Margaret Diamante's arms were "littered with claw marks and scratches," which Portage Detective Matt Wolfe described as "defensive wounds."

No trial date has been set.

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House again fails to override veto of children's health bill

1/23/2008, 3:12 p.m. ET

By KEVIN FREKING
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the second time in three months, the House failed Wednesday to override President Bush's veto of a bill that would greatly increase spending on a popular children's health insurance program.

Democratic leaders fell 15 votes shy of obtaining the two-thirds majority needed for an override. The final vote was 260-152, with 42 Republicans siding with Democrats.

The result was expected, even as supporters of an override turned to the slowing economy as another reason to spend an additional \$35 billion on the State Children's Health Insurance Program over the next five years.

"Hardworking American families are struggling and in dire need of assistance," said Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C.

But Republicans held strong in their opposition to the spending increase. They said Congress had already set aside sufficient funding to ensure that the SCHIP program would continue through March 2009 for those currently enrolled. They criticized Democrats for delaying an override vote to coincide more closely with next week's State of the Union address from President Bush.

"I think it's important to highlight that this is simply a political exercise," said Rep. Dave Camp, R-Mich.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said that the House would continue to focus on the program during the coming election year.

"This won't be your last opportunity this year to address this issue," Hoyer told lawmakers during the debate.

The legislation that Bush vetoed would have increased enrollment in the children's health program from 6 million to 10 million over the coming five years. The revenue needed for that enrollment increase would come from a 61-cent increase in the federal excise tax on a pack of cigarettes, as well as comparable tax increases on other tobacco products.

In December, Bush for a second time vetoed a bill that would more than double spending on SCHIP. Bush said the bill would encourage too many families to replace private insurance with government-subsidized health coverage.

The president vetoed a similar bill in October. Democratic leaders then fell 13 votes short in their attempt to override that particular veto.

The children's health program serves families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough to afford private insurance.

Several Democrats cited the economy in arguing for the override, which was a new tact from the previous SCHIP debates.

"The issue comes down to what is happening in America's households today. Unemployment is up, housing starts are down. The price of gasoline and food and health care is up, the stock market is down," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Pelosi said those indicators required Congress to take a new direction.

Some Republicans said expanding SCHIP was not an economic stimulus.

"We don't want to squander money to pay for health insurance for those who can afford it themselves," said Rep. Phil Gingrey, R-Ga.

Rep. Gene Green, D-Texas, said Republicans wanted to save money on SCHIP to pay for an economic stimulus, but didn't have a similar rule for spending on Iraq.

"It's amazing how frugal they are when they want to be," Green said.

Both sides said they were willing to sit down after the vote in an effort to reach a compromise. Republicans contend that the current bill does not go far enough to prevent adults and illegal immigrants from getting health coverage through government programs.

But Democrats said such claims were greatly exaggerated. The bill maintains a prohibition on illegal immigrants participating in SCHIP.

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Nursing home has Medicare status yanked

Thursday, January 24, 2008

By Kristin Longley

klongley@citpat.com -- 768-4917

Stockbridge Country Manor is fighting to stay open after the federal government terminated its Medicare status, which could effectively shut down the nursing home.

The 53-bed facility had 26 health violations in its July inspection -- more than twice the state average -- and was found to continue to be in violation on Jan. 10, said Michael Marchand, a spokesman for the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

He said he couldn't immediately determine how many violations were found during the second visit.

Violations included failure to make sure the nursing home area is free of dangers that cause accidents.

Stockbridge Country Manor, 406 W. Main St., is fighting the order in federal court, records show. A judge issued a 10-day restraining order Friday prohibiting the state from involuntarily removing residents.

A person who answered the phone at the Ingham County facility Wednesday said the nursing home had no comment.

The federal Medicare agency removed the nursing home's status on Sunday, which means it will lose its funding for Medicare and Medicaid patients after 30 days. The facility has until mid-February to transfer residents. It had 49 residents as of last week, according to the Medicare Web site.

Nursing homes frequently are forced to close if the Medicare or Medicaid status is terminated, Marchand said, because of the reduced funding.

A spokesman for the state Department of Community Health, which handles nursing home inspections, referred all questions to the federal Medicare agency.

Attempts to reach Country Manor's attorney, Elizabeth J. Fossel of Grand Rapids, were unsuccessful Wednesday afternoon.

Stockbridge Country Manor was selected by the Consumers Research Council of America, an independent research company, to be in the 2003 Consumer Guide as one of America's top nursing homes, according to Citizen Patriot files.

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PRESS & GUIDE

Rotary Club assists Salvation Army program

By Ben Baird
, Press & Guide Newspapers

DEARBORN

Apples, bananas and oranges were among the 1,000 pieces of fruit recently donated to the Dearborn Rotary Club by Super Greenland Market.

Bob Ziolkowski, second vice president of the Dearborn Rotary, said the club used the fruit to help the Salvation Army assemble lunches.

The Salvation Army delivers around 5,000 lunches every day by truck to underprivileged residents of the Metro Detroit area, Ziolkowski said.

"For some of them it may be their only substantial meal on a given day," Ziolkowski said.

The Dearborn Rotary agreed to help the Salvation Army create a total of 5,000 lunches spread between three different dates, Ziolkowski said. He said the club created about 1,500 lunches for Jan. 12. The club plans to create more lunches for March 29 and June 21, he said.

The Dearborn Rotary has many causes, Ziolkowski said, one of them is to help people in need.

Jamal Koussan is the owner of Super Greenland Market, located at 12715 W. Warren Ave. "We're very proud to be a part of this community," Koussan said after donating the fruit. "It's only natural to give back."

Koussan said he felt it was his duty as the owner of a community store to help the Dearborn Rotary. He said he didn't bother calculating the cost of the fruit.

"To receive 1,000 pieces of fresh apples, oranges and bananas makes such a meaningful difference to the Salvation Army's effort to feed the hungry," said Ziolkowski. "Koussan has already offered to help us again when our club repeats the effort in March and June."

Koussan said his next donations won't necessarily be fruit. It could involve other services offered at Super Greenland Market, he said, like the bakery or deli.

The Dearborn Rotary has received other donations too. Ziolkowski said the Dearborn Farm Market at 2645 Monroe St. donated 10 pounds of cheese and a 30 percent discount on ham for the sandwiches.

The Dearborn Rotary Foundation, the Dearborn Rotary's source of funding to help people in need, donated \$1,000 towards assembling the lunches, Ziolkowski said. He said the foundation plans to make additional donations for when the club creates the lunches for March 29 and June 21, both Saturdays.

Ziolkowski said the Dearborn Rotary decided to create lunches on Saturday because the Salvation Army doesn't have volunteers to help do it on weekends.

Christ Episcopal Church in Dearborn allowed the Dearborn Rotary to use its kitchen, Ziolkowski said. Volunteers from the church are planning to help assemble the sandwiches for the future dates.

Ziolkowski said the lunches consisted of a sandwich with meat and cheese, packaged with a piece of donated fruit and cookies.

"The Rotary Club is a well established organization in the community that offers many services," Koussan said.

Koussan said this was the first contact Super Greenland Market's had with the Dearborn Rotary. He said he thinks it's the beginning of a long-term relationship.

"We have high hopes that we'll continue to be partners," Koussan said.

It was difficult to find donations in January, Ziolkowski said, because many donations are made in December around the holidays.

Rotary is the world's first service organization, which was founded by Paul P. Harris in 1905 in Chicago, Illinois. Today, Rotary has evolved into an international service organization of 1.2 million business and professional leaders in 31,000 clubs, located in 166 countries, worldwide.

The Dearborn Rotary Club is one of 50 clubs in Rotary District 6400 which includes Wayne, Monroe and Lenawee counties in Michigan and Essex County in Ontario. Dearborn Rotary meets weekly at Park Place in Dearborn. For additional information about the Dearborn Rotary, visit www.dearbornrotary.org or call 313-278-7233.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.pressandguide.com/stories/012308/loc_20080123008.shtml

Michigan Report

January 23, 2008

HOUSE APPROVES HOME HEATING FUND; STATE GETS \$27M FROM U.S.

Income taxpayers in Michigan would have the option of donating part of their return to a home heating fund administered by the state under legislation receiving unanimous approval by the House on Wednesday. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program got a separate boost with Wednesday's announcement the state is getting \$27.4 million in additional federal funds.

The package creates the income tax check-off with monies going into a state fund directed by the Department of Treasury ([HB 4064](#), passed 105-0 and [HB 4280](#), passed 106-0).

"The importance of heating your home certainly takes on greater meaning during these cold winter days, as well as during our current economic crisis," said [Rep. Mike Nofs](#) (R-Battle Creek), one of the bill sponsors. "Many low-income families or those who are struggling to find work may need help to cover heating costs. My legislation will help provide additional resources to make sure all Michigan residents and children can stay warm in their homes."

Those funds could not be used for any other purpose and are intended to cover credits that are not funded by federal LIHEAP block grants. The minimum contribution of \$5 could raise at least \$1.5 million.

The state has not been able to fully fund the formula for assistance to low-income persons since 2002, and in recent years, the level has been 76 percent of the maximum allowed. [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) and other Midwestern governors had asked in December for an increase in current-year funding.

The new federal funds, bringing the total to \$173 million in Department of Human Services and Public Service Commission programs, will enable the state to increase the assistance level, cover more families or a combination of both, Budget Office spokesperson Leslee Fritz said.

The state provided assistance in 2006-07 to 466,000 households, but received 24,000 more applications in October-December than in the same period in 2006.

"The rising cost of home heating continues to put serious financial burdens on our residents," Department of Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed said. "This action will help keep Michigan citizens warm and help low-income families deal with ever-increasing energy costs."



Goodwill support helps clients succeed in permanent homes

BY VANESSA McCRAY

TRAVERSE CITY -- Patrick Rachels suffered a spate of bad luck that brought him to the Goodwill Inn Homeless Shelter.

But following his six-month stay, Rachels began to rebound with a lift from the agency's Supportive Housing Services. The program assists with a variety of tasks tailored to fit each client, including help for shelter residents looking for their own place.

"There's no climbing out of a hole without some help ...," said Rachels, 51.

Program officials contacted a landlord so Rachels could move out of the shelter and into his own Traverse City apartment in November of 2006. He continues to meet monthly with housing services personnel.

"Basically, they just see that you are getting along all right," he said. "They are there for you, even if you've just got something going on and you want to talk about it."

Part of the philosophy behind the program is to push people to succeed so they don't return to the shelter or become homeless again.

"Once we got them housing before, they were on their own," said Ken Homa, director of housing services for Goodwill Industries of Northern Michigan.

The service took off about a year and half ago and is supported through federal and state housing dollars. A case manager meets with clients and develops a service plan and offers ongoing aid such as bill payment reminders, help with rental unit upkeep and working with landlords.

Foundation for Mental Health Grand Traverse/Leelanau works with Goodwill to provide on-site services to tenants at an 11-unit facility on Woodmere Avenue. Foundation executive director Carol Moorman said residents must meet special needs, low income and homeless criteria. Tenants receive help with budgeting and transportation, among other services.

The supportive housing program currently assists about 20 individuals and families, mostly in Grand Traverse County, said Cindy Eveleigh, Goodwill's housing services manager.

Eveleigh said there's a big need for more units geared for low-income renters.

A portion of Rachels' rent is picked up through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

Rachels arrived at the shelter after losing his job and running out of money. He had been working downstate as a security officer when his car broke down and it became difficult to make the commute to work. He had ties to northern Michigan, and returned to the area.

"That's the way things can snowball on you. Once you knock one support away, everything else just falls," Rachels said.

Now living in his own apartment, Rachels is unemployed and job hunting. He would like to be a driver for the local bus system, and is thankful for the long-term approach of the supportive housing program.

"It's not that they just push you through and once you are out the door they forget about you," he said.

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Photos



Patrick Rachels was down on his luck and became homeless. With the help of the Goodwill Inn and its program called Supportive Housing Service, Rachels now has his own apartment. Record-Eagle

Grandma's new house? Clinton Township

Development is proposed for those raising grandkids

January 24, 2008

BY CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Raising her five youngest children, Debbie Rodgers already had a lot on her plate before she began caring for her three grandkids more than a year ago.

One thing missing from the family's balancing act is an affordable and spacious place they can call their own.

Advertisement

For now, they are staying in the house of Sharon Smith, who attends their church, in Clinton Township's Quinn Road community.

A proposed development is giving Rodgers' family hope.

The Quinn Road Community Housing Development Corp., a council dedicated to revitalizing 64 acres on Quinn Road between Harper and Gratiot, wants to build the first low-income housing complex for Macomb County residents raising grandchildren.

"That is an ever-increasing subpopulation," Project Manager Greg Murray said.

Approximately 10,000 children in Macomb County are being raised by their grandparents, said Mary Potts, kinship coordinator for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

An apartment complex specifically for them would be a great option since many older caregivers live in senior housing where there isn't enough space for children, Potts said.

"For a single parent with credit messed up, it's hard. With the everyday struggle of maintaining, it shouldn't be about housing," Rodgers said.

Rodgers, 43, said she'd rather spend her time focused on her family. She strives to be both doting grandmother and disciplinarian parent juggling work, school and recreational schedules since her daughter Rebbie died in a car crash.

She keeps a close eye on her 8-year-old granddaughter, Na'Jay Cole, by working in several areas of her Clinton Township school. And after rising at 5:30 a.m. and going to work, Rodgers spends time with her 3-year-old twin granddaughters, Mariha and Maressa Rodgers, by watching "Dora the Explorer" and "Blue's Clues" videos.

Not only would the proposed complex be ideal financially, but tenants in similar situations could provide emotional support for each other, Rodgers said.

The site's owner, the Grosse Pointes-Clinton Refuse Disposal Authority, might announce a decision about the proposed deal at its March 11 meeting in Grosse Pointe Shores, Clinton Township Treasurer Bill Sowerby said.

The Quinn Road group wants to buy the property for \$1. If approved, the five-year development with help from Detroit nonprofit Messiah Housing Corp. and the county will begin by removing toxins from soil where a landfill and incinerator sat. Then construction of single-family homes ranging from \$140,000 to \$210,000, a senior center and a park or even nine-hole golf course would follow.

Advocates of the development say this is the disposal authority's chance to redeem itself for burning trash on vacant land in the predominately black community.

Contact **CHRISTY OYAMA-ARBOSCELLO** at 586-469-8085 or c arboscello@freepress.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080124/NEWS04/801240361>

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Thursday, January 24, 2008

Tax break for poor may cost far less

New Earned Income Tax Credit will cost state \$41M, not more than \$100M, economist says.

Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- A new Michigan tax break for the working poor that took effect this month will cost the state budget considerably less than initially estimated, an economist reported Wednesday.

The Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit, which for the first time this year will piggyback on the federal credit and could benefit about 600,000 families, has been projected to cost next year's state budget more than \$100 million and more than twice that when fully phased in the following year.

But the net cost will be about \$41 million in the first year and \$100 million in the second year when the state takes into account the reduced burden on government programs for the poor and wage-earners who get the relief and will return some of it to the state via sales tax and other levies, said East Lansing-based economist Patrick Anderson. He was hired by the Michigan Catholic Conference to study the issue.

"There is still a cost to the state budget, but not nearly as high as you would expect," Anderson said. "This is a very low-cost program that helps get our society where it wants to go."

State Budget Director Bob Emerson said next year's state budget will include a \$129 million cost for the credit -- but that doesn't allow for the mitigating factors and assumes everyone who is eligible for the break will claim it, which is unlikely.

"This is wonderful economic policy as well as social policy," said Emerson, who was a leading advocate for the legislation when he was in the state Senate.

Under the program, taxpayers who qualify for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit can claim 10 percent of their federal credit amount on their Michigan income tax beginning in the 2008 tax year. Starting in 2009, the state credit is 20 percent of the federal amount.

A single mom with two children and earning the minimum wage would get a state credit of \$478 for the 2008 tax year, according to the Michigan League for Human Services.

"That can buy food for a family for a month with \$100 left over for shoes for growing children," said Ann Marston, president of the league.

The Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit was passed into law in 2006 as part of negotiations over a raise in the state minimum wage.

Sen. Nancy Cassis, R-Novi, has introduced a bill that would postpone the tax break until there is \$250 million in the state's rainy day fund, contending that the state can't afford the abatement until it is on more solid financial footing.

This study is part of a campaign to head off a move to delay the credit.

"We have tax break after tax break after tax break for businesses and for higher income taxpayers," Marston said. "Fairness dictates that we give those who are struggling the most a break."

You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or mhornbeck@detnews.com.

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Groups rally to keep earned income tax credit in place

1/23/2008, 5:07 p.m. ET

By **TIM MARTIN**
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Supporters of a new state tax credit for low-income working people say it must take effect this year as scheduled, despite what it might cost a tight state budget.

The state's earned income tax credit, or EITC, complements a federal tax credit and is designed to put more money back in the pockets of low-income workers. It allows them to claim an amount equal to 10 percent of the federal credit in the 2008 tax year and 20 percent in 2009 and after.

For a single adult with two children working full-time at minimum wage and making \$14,872 a year, the credit brings a savings of \$478 in the first year. More than 600,000 working families are eligible for the credit.

Republican Sen. Nancy Cassis, R-Novi, last year introduced legislation that would keep the credit from going into effect until the state's nearly depleted rainy day fund is healthier. The bill has not advanced in the Senate.

Estimates show the state would lose up to \$130 million in revenue from the credit for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

But supporters of the credit issued a study Wednesday that says the net loss to the state likely is closer to \$41 million because of the credit's other benefits.

The credit would allow more people to get and keep jobs and allow low-income taxpayers to keep more of their own cash, East Lansing economist Patrick Anderson said. That would bring in more payroll and sales taxes for the state, and reduce the state's benefits costs to the unemployed or underemployed.

The Michigan Catholic Conference and the Michigan League for Human Services are among the groups saying the tax credit must be protected. State budget director Robert Emerson, who was a chief architect of the plan while in the state Senate, also wants it to be kept in place.

"Our message today is that the state cannot chip away at the budget deficit on the backs of Michigan's working poor," said Paul Long of the Michigan Catholic Conference. "Such action would amount to nothing more than a tax increase on those working families who are struggling to climb above the poverty line in Michigan."

The earned income tax credit bill is Senate Bill 662.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

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Michigan Report

January 23, 2008

PRESERVE EARNED INCOME CREDIT, GROUPS URGE

State officials should put aside any consideration of delaying implementation of the new earned income tax credit, groups supporting the program said Wednesday. They pointed to an updated study of the credit indicating the net cost to the state is far less than the upfront loss of up to \$127 million due to gains to the economy as the money is spent and some lower use of social services.

The credit kicks in this year at 10 percent of the federal credit, and increases to 20 percent in 2009.

It had been included in discussions last year by some legislators as one of the ways to recoup costs as the state resolved a \$1 billion deficit.

Paul Long, vice president for public policy at the Michigan Catholic Conference, called that "unfortunate because of the importance to those 600,000 persons who benefit from the earned income tax credit. It is the best and most effective government program to help the working poor."

Patrick Anderson, whose firm the Anderson Economic Group analyzed the impact of the credit, said the credit is particularly important in Michigan where income taxes begin to apply for those who earn as little as \$5,000. The earned income tax credit means that earnings could get to \$10,000-\$12,000 before taxes are incurred, he said.

The AEG study assumed the lost income tax revenue at \$104.1 million, because not all of the eligible will use it, but said the net cost after factoring in spending patterns, social security and other payments and lower social costs drops to about \$40.7 million. By 2013, the estimated revenue loss would be \$275.1 million, but the net cost to the state would be \$129.4 million, the report said.

"It's a very low-cost program and it helps get society where it needs to go," Mr. Anderson said.

Michigan League for Human Services President Ann Marston said groups such as hers will be working to raise awareness of the program among those who are eligible. "This brings fairness to the tax system," she said. She said the benefit to a single parent with two children would be \$478 a year. Matt Marsden, spokesperson for Senate [Majority Leader Mike Bishop](#) (R-Rochester), said while nothing should be taken off the table when

considering options for writing the new budget, he has heard no discussion of delaying implementation of the credit.

State Budget Director Bob Emerson, who was a leader in gaining approval of the program when still in the Senate, said he doubts a bill delaying the program would reach the governor's desk. If it did and [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) vetoed it, he said she "would be looking for a new budget director."